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THE COMING STAGE IN THE KOREAN TRUCE TALKS

The new proposals which the UN Command is to present to the Communists at Panmunjom on 25 May are expected to approximate the amended Indian truce proposal endorsed by the UN General Assembly on 3 December 1952. If this is the case, the Communists are expected to accept one of the two major points and to reject the other, the critical point as to the disposition of prisoners who remain unwilling to be repatriated after Communist "explanations" to them.

The UN-endorsed plan provided for a four-nation neutral commission to take custody of all prisoners unwilling to return, and a period of 90 days in which the Communists would have access to the prisoners. The critical point provided for disposition by a political conference (agreed to in the draft armistice agreement) of prisoners who remained unwilling to return after the 90-day period, with the fate of the prisoners to be decided by the United Nations if the political conference could not agree on this issue within 30 days.

The Communists and the UN Command have already agreed on the custodial commission, the four nations named in the 3 December proposal plus India. The Communists have most recently sought a period of four months for "explanations" and unlimited access to the prisoners during this period. They are expected to agree, sooner or later, to a period of 90 days and to limited access. The limitations on time and access, however, will mean that the Communists will be less disposed than ever to compromise on the final point of the disposition of the prisoners who remain unwilling to return.

All Communist proposals have sought to block the release of prisoners. There was evidence during October and November of last year of strong Soviet and Chinese Communist interest in the Indian proposal, which, as originally conceived and as presented on 17 November, provided for disposition by a political conference of prisoners remaining unwilling to return. The current Communist proposal is identical in that respect. On 19 November, however, the Indian delegate first suggested the critical amendment providing for the United

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Nations to decide the fate of those unwilling to return if the political conference could not agree in 30 days, and on 23 November this amendment was included in a redrafted version. On 24 November the Soviet Foreign Minister violently denounced the Indian plan in the UN.

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Assuming that the UN Command's 25 May proposal relating to the final disposition of POW's will include this critical amendment, the Communists may be expected to reject this part of the proposal. Their initial response will almost certainly be to reaffirm their demand for indefinite consideration of the prisoners' fate by the political conference, where the Communists could indefinitely block their release.

Under UN pressures, such as threats of recessing the talks, releasing the prisoners, or intensifying hostilities, the Communists might propose a compromise, namely the disposition by the five-nation custodial commission, by majority vote, of those POW's who remain unwilling to return. In discussions with the Indians last fall and in naming India to the commission currently, the Communists have indicated some confidence that India, in the interest of attaining peace, would support compromises favoring the Communists. Indian Prime Minister Nehru has presumably enhanced such Communist confidence, in recent days, by asserting that current Communist proposals are very close to the UN-endorsed resolution of 3 December, thus obscuring the critical amendment in the 3 December resolution.